

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 3003

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (AMCONSUL JERUSALEM ADDED AS
INFO ADDEE)

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI PBOR IS LE PLO XF
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON

1. WHILE I WAS SEEING DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN OFF FOR THE UNITED STATES, WE HAD A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE INCREASINGLY WORRISOME SITUATION ALONG THE LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER. HE DROPPED A BROAD HINT THAT PRESSURES WERE BUILDING UP WITHIN THE GOI TO TAKE SOME CROSS-BORDER ACTION IN LIGHT OF THE MOVEMENT OF SA'IQA UNITS VERY CLOSE TO THE BORDER FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND IN THE WAKE OF THE CHRISTIAN DEBACLE AT MAROUN EL-RAS HE SAID HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA FOR ME TO RAISE THIS SUBJECT WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN BEFORE TOO MUCH TIME PASSED, WQTHOUT IN ANYWAY REFERRING TO WEIZMAN.

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2. I DID SO DURING A PRIVATE MEETING WITH BEGIN ON OTHER SUBJECTS ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 6. BEGIN WAS OBVIOUSLY QUITE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SA'IQA DEPLOYMENTS AND ASKED WHETHER WE COULD DO ANYTHING TO GET THEM WITHDRAWN. I RECALLED OUR EARLIER CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE DIMINUTION OF LEVERAGE IN DAMASCUS ON SUCH MATTERS IN THE WAKE OF THE SADAT PEACE INITIATIVE, WHICH

HE SADLY ACKNOWLEDGED. I MADE A VERY STRONG ARGUMENT THAT THE DANGER OF SOME EXPLOSION IN SOUTH LEBANON WAS AT PRESENT MUCH MORE LIKELY TO COME FROM CHRISTIAN PROVOCATION THAN ANYTHING ELSE, AND THAT IT WAS VERY MUCH IN ISRAEL'S INTERESTS TO RESTRAIN THE CHRISTIANS FROM PROVOKING PALESTINIAN REACTION. I DESCRIBED THE MAROUN EL-RAS AFFAIR AS TOTALLY THE FAULT OF THE CHRISTIANS WHO HAD OCCUPIED THE VILLAGE SUDDENLY IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND PROVOKED THE PALESTINIAN REACTION WHICH LED TO THE SAD EVENTS OF RETALIATION AGAINST THE SHI'A MUSLIM INHABITANTS. IT WAS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE, I SAID, OF WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF THE CHRISTIANS ATTEMPT UNWISELY TO IMPROVE THEIR SITUATION IN THE BORDER AREA. I UNDERSCORED SEVERAL TIMES THE VERY GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR AVOIDING ANY FLAREUPS IN SOUTH LEBANON IN THE WEEKS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD, AND PARTICULARLY DURING THE IMPORTANT VISITS TO WASHINGTON JUST IMPENDING.

3. BEGIN SEEMED TO TAKE MY POINT. HE ARGUED WEAKLY THAT THERE WAS ANOTHER VERSION OF THE EVENTS AT MAROUN EL-RAS, BUT HE DID NOT OIEEM INCLINED TO PURSUE THE MATTER.

4. ONE CAN NEVER BE SURE, BUT IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THIS DISCUSSION WILL HAVE SOME USEFUL RESTRAINING EFFECT ON WHATEVER SCHEMES FOR CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS MAY BE AFOOT. I HOPE THAT THINGS WILL REMAIN TOLERABLY QUIET
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FOR AT LEAST A WHILE, ALTHOUGH BOTH WEIZMAN AND BEGIN INSIST THAT THEY HAVE FAR LESS CONTROL OVER THE CHRISTIAN PROTAGANISTS IN THE SOUTH THAN THEY WOULD WISH UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. IN THE LONGER RUN, THE INFILTRATION OF SA'IQA UNITS VERY CLOSE TO THE ISRAELI BORDER IS NOT LIKELY TO BE SOMETHING THE ISRAELIS WILL TOLERATE IF THEY CAN FIND A WAY TO "DISCOURAGE IT." IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA FOR ALL OF US TO TRY TO THINK ABOUT SOME WAY TO GET THE SA'IQA TO M3 ?-:(9.3 \$8 5-,:3 59 -;98\$.-'94 5497?)3. TROUBLE WE WILL BE HAVING ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, IN ANY EVENT. BUT THE SA'IQA FOR ISRAEL SPELLS "SYRIA." AND THE ISRAELIS ARE NO MORE READY TODAY THAN THEY HAVE BEEN IN THE PAST TO HAVE SYRIAN REGULAR FORCES ON THEIR FRONTIER WITH LEBANON. LEWIS

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